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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

THE VOW

Tread softly, softly,
Scuffle no dust.
No common thoughts shall thrust
Upon this peaceful decay,
This mold and rust of yesterday.
This is an altar with its incense blown away
By the indifferent wind of a long, sad night;
These are the precincts of the dead who die
Unconquered. Haply
You who haunt this place
May deign some gesture of forgiveness
To those of our sundered race
Who come in all humility
Asking an alms of pardon.
Suffer us to feel an ease, [trees,
A benefice of love poured down on us from these magnolia
That when we leave you we shall know the bitter wound
Of our long mutual scourging healed at last and sound.

Through an iron gate, fantastically scrolled and garlanded,
Along a path, green with moss, between two rows of high
magnolia trees—

*How lightly the wind drips through the magnolias;
How slightly the magnolias bend to the wind.*

It stands, pushed back into a corner of the piazza—
A jouncing-board, with its paint scaled off,

Amy Lowell

A jouncing-board which creaks when you sit upon it.
*The wind rattles the stiff leaves of the magnolias:
So may tinkling banjos drown the weeping of women.*

When the Yankees came like a tide of locusts,
When blue uniforms blocked the ends of streets,
And foolish, arrogant swords struck through the paintings
of a hundred years:
*From gold and ivory coasts come the winds that jingle in
the tree-tops;
But the sigh of the wind in the unshaven grass, from
whence is that?*

Proud hearts who could not endure desecration,
Who almost loathed the sky because it was blue;
Vengeful spirits, locked in young, arrogant bodies,
You cursed yourselves with a vow:
Never would you set foot again in Charleston streets,
Never leave your piazza till Carolina was rid of Yankees.
*O smooth wind sliding in from the sea,
It is a matter of no moment to you what flag you are
flapping.*

Ocean tides, morning and evening, slipping past the sea-
islands;
Tides slipping in through the harbor, shaking the palmetto
posts,
Slipping out through the harbor;
Pendulum tides, counting themselves upon the sea-islands.

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So they jounced, for health's sake,
To be well and able to rejoice when once again the city was
free,
And the lost cause won, and the stars and bars afloat over
Sumter.
The days which had roared to them called more softly,
The days whispered, the days were silent, they moved as
imperceptibly as mist.

And the proud hearts went with the days, into the dusk
of age, the darkness of death.
Slowly they were borne away through a Charleston they
scarcely remembered.
The jouncing-board was pushed into a corner;
Only the magnolia-trees tossed a petal to it, now and again,
if there happened to be a strong wind when the
blooms were dropping.

Hush, go gently,
Do not move a pebble with your foot.
This is a moment of pause,
A moment to recollect the futility of cause.
A moment to bow the head
And greet the unconcerned dead,
Denying nothing of their indifference,
And then go hence
And forget them again,
Since lives are lived with living men.

Amy Lowell